

Roanoke River

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1989.
- Acres: 20,978.
- Other management: Two satellite tracts totaling 174 acres and 98 conservation easements totaling 2,870 acres in 19 counties.
- Location: The refuge consists of several tracts of land scattered along 70 miles of the River from Hamilton, NC to the mouth of the River at the Albemarle Sound. Refuge headquarters are in Windsor, NC.

Natural History

- Refuge lands are located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain and are part of an extensive bottomland hardwood forest supported by wehadkee and chewacla soils. Refuge habitat consists of bottomland hardwood forests, cypress/tupelo swamps, black and brown water streams, and hardwood and loblolly pine plantations in the upland areas.
- Concentrations of wintering waterfowl, nesting ducks, raptors and neo-tropical migrants are common. At least three heron rookeries are located on the refuge, including what is believed to be the largest inland heron rookery in North Carolina.
- Though its current status is not know, the endangered shortnose sturgeon may be present near the mouth of the River.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Five-person staff.
- 5,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, neo-tropical migrants and other birds.
- Provide migrating, spawning and nursery habitat for anadromous fish; i.e. blueback herring, alewife, hickory shad and striped bass.

- Enhance and protect forested wetlands consisting of bottomland hardwoods and swamps.
- To protect and manage for endangered and threatened wildlife.
- Provide recreation and environmental education for the public.

Management tools

- Water management for wintering and nesting waterfowl, wading bird rookeries and anadromous fish nurseries.
- Wetland restoration.
- Bottomland hardwood management.
- Mechanical or chemical treatment of non-native plants.
- Deer and turkey management with public hunting.
- Environmental education and interpretation.
- Law enforcement.

Partnerships

- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.
- North Carolina Department of the Environment and Natural Resources.
- Partnership for the Sounds.
- The Nature Conservancy.
- Dominion Generation.
- National Marine Fisheries Service.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- Ducks Unlimited.
- U.S. Geological Survey.
- Bertie County.
- Town of Windsor.
- The Conservation Fund.
- NC Museum of Natural History.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

- NC State University.
- Clemson University.
- University of Wisconsin - Madison.
- Roanoke River Partners.

Visitor Opportunities

- Hunting.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildlife photography.
- Environmental education.
- Wildlife interpretation.
- Trails.

Calendar of Events

April: youth turkey hunt.

April-May: turkey hunts.

May: International Migratory Bird Day.

September-October: archery/muzzleloader deer hunts.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

October-November: deer hunts.

October-December: small game hunts.

November-December: waterfowl hunts.

Questions and Answers:

When is something going to be done with the flows on the river?

Flows on the lower Roanoke River, defined as the area from below Roanoke Rapids to the River's mouth, are managed by three dams, the US Army Corps of Engineer's (USACOE) John H. Kerr flood control project and two private hydro-power projects owned by Dominion Generation.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is working with over forty stakeholders to address the flow issues on the River and any impacts they may have on fish and wildlife resources. There are two formal processes underway to address the flow issues. The first was the issuance of a new license by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to Dominion Generation (DG). DG was issued a new license in March 2005, after fourteen years of meetings with stakeholders. The

various stakeholders belong to the Cooperative Management Team (CMT). Members of the CMT consist of representatives from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, non-profit groups, and local governments.

Under the new forty-year license, the FERC has directed DG to conduct studies and monitor the possible impacts of their hydro-power operations may have on fish and wildlife resources. DG agreed to conduct the studies with input from the CMT on decisions and providing additional financial support to cover the studies.

Depending on study results, flows may be adjusted to minimize impacts using an adaptive management approach.

The second process is a USACOE section 216 study, which authorizes the USACOE to evaluate the operations of their John H. Kerr flood control project on the Roanoke River and any impacts it may have on fish and wildlife resources. If it is found that USACOE's flood control operations are adversely impacting fish and wildlife resources such that impacts outweigh project benefits, then the USACOE will consider changing their operations. Addressing the flow issues on the River is a long and tedious process, as local economies and human activities within the floodplain have evolved around the River's current managed flow regime. The FWS is hopeful that the outcome of the section 216 study and DG's obligations under their new license will restore a more natural flow regime to the lower Roanoke River.

Is camping allowed?

Primitive camping is allowed only in conjunction with refuge permit hunts.

Do I need a hunting permit?

Special hunt permits are required to hunt on refuge lands. Permits are issued by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). Information, application procedures and hunt dates can be obtained by visiting their website: www.ncwildlife.org, by calling 1-888-248-6834 or

through the Permit Hunting Opportunities booklet annually published by NCWRC. The booklet can be obtained from NCWRC's website, through local sporting goods centers or at the refuge headquarters.

What are hunting conditions like?

Refuge staff can provide you with this information. Conditions depend on the season and river flows, which can abruptly change.

Where can I go on the refuge for good birding?

Kuralt Trail, a 1.5 mile round-trip walk, is located on Highway 13/17 just north of Williamston, NC and offers the best location for birding. Other natural river levees and trails off Highway 13/17 offer good birding opportunities as well. There are designated parking areas at each site.